

Citizenship in Hong Kong and The Identity Dilemma

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Citizenship denotes a sense of collective meaning and destiny for a community. However, citizenship and citizenship education have always been contested notions, especially in the new globalized world. For Hong Kong, they are even more complex and contentious issues because of the city's unique historical and political pathway.

It has been argued that the parallel processes of decolonization from Hong Kong's past and its future psychological reunification with Mainland China may produce a new biculturalism that would characterize the new Hong Kong person¹. Looking at the historical trajectory of the Hong Kong identity, there have been more dilemmas and tensions than what is captured by the biculturalism thesis. In the run up to 1997 when Hong Kong reverted to Chinese sovereignty, Hong Kong had gone through rather heated and at times divisive debates when it came to defining citizenship during the drafting of the Basic Law, discussing the direction and content of civic education and national education, as well as the formulation of the language policy for local schools. The clash of identities has always been central to how Hong Kong people discover and articulate their sense of relatedness – to their own habitat, their motherland, and to the world at large given the city's global status.

There are several dimensions of citizenship – the historical, cultural, social, civic, legal and political. These rest on rather different conceptual frames, and personal and collective experiences. Since reunification, the politics of identity has been on the ascendancy in Hong Kong, spurred by a new current of collective memory and local heritage preservation. The advent of globalization and the rise of China are together rewriting the script for Hong Kong in the 21st century. Hong Kong people may well need to balance the three 'selves' of a new

¹ Sik-hung Ng (2007) "Biculturalism in Multicultural Hong Kong", *Journal of Psychology in Chinese Societies*, Vol. 8, No. 2, pp. 121-40.

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composite Hong Kong identity – the 'local self', the 'national self', and the 'international self' – which will in turn shape the evolving discussion and perception of citizenship.